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U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire, D-Fourth District has helped to restore funding for two federal grant programs that provide critical support to western Pennsylvania fire companies, according to an announcement from his office.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act originally cut funding for the Assistance to Firefighters [AFG] and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response [SAFER] grant programs by more than 50 percent, Altmire's office said.

The Richland Township Volunteer Fire Department recently received an AFG grant to purchase fire-retardant suits for 40 firefighters.

"The AFG grant we received will enable us to purchase the fire-retardant clothing our firefighters need to protect themselves and rescue others," said Fire Chief Jim Kelly of the Richland Township Volunteer Fire Department. "I don't know how the volunteer fire departments would survive without the assistance of these fire grants."

Several of the 150-plus fire departments in Altmire's district have received AFG or SAFER grants.

After Altmire spoke on the House floor about how these programs help western Pennsylvania firefighters protect their communities, the House passed an amendment that restored a significant portion of the funding, according to the announcement from his office.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act passed this week by a 231-188 vote.

"The AFG and SAFER programs have helped dozens of western Pennsylvania fire departments equip, train, and maintain their personnel so that they are prepared to respond to any emergency," Altmire said.

"As a result of the recent economic downturn and budget constraints at all levels of government, many fire departments have already been forced to cut personnel and services. By restoring funding for AFG and SAFER programs, we can help local fire companies on tight budgets obtain the resources they need to protect their communities."